THE FAMOUS TRAGEDY of the QUEEN of CORNWALL

by

THOMAS HARDY

THE FAMOUS TRAGEDY

OF THE

QUEEN OF CORNWALL

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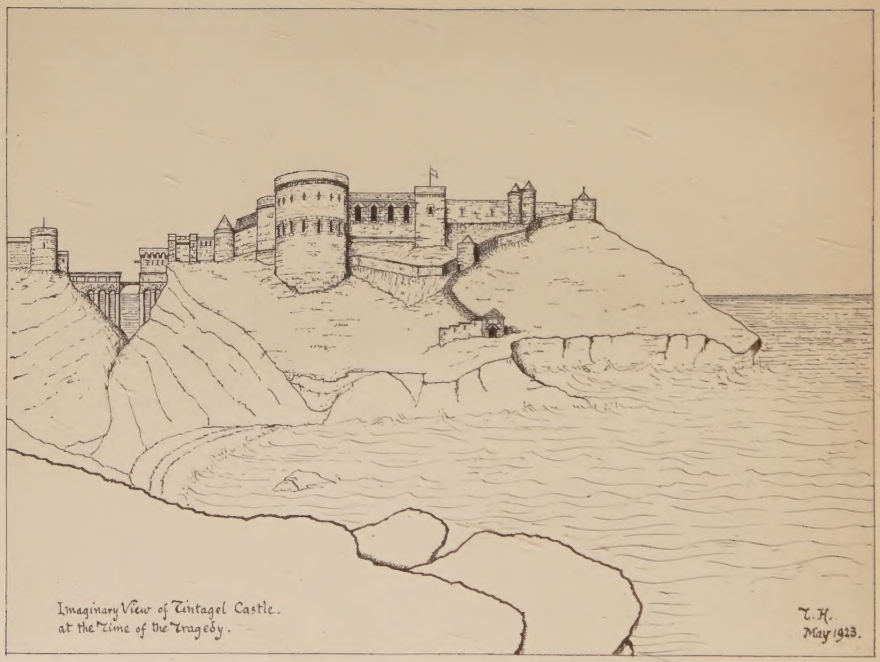
Imaginary View of Tintagel Castle
at the Time of the Tragedy.
T. H.
May 1923.

THE FAMOUS TRAGEDY

OF THE

QUEEN OF CORNWALL

AT TINTAGEL IN LYONNESSE

A NEW VERSION OF AN OLD STORY
ARRANGED AS A PLAY FOR MUMMERS

IN ONE ACT
REQUIRING NO THEATRE OR SCENERY

BY

THOMAS HARDY

"Isot ma drue, Isot m'amie,
En vos ma mort, en vos ma vie!"
GOTTFRIED VON STRASSBURG.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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1923

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IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE
OF THOSE WITH WHOM I FORMERLY SPENT
MANY HOURS AT
THE SCENE OF THE TRADITION,
WHO HAVE NOW ALL PASSED AWAY
SAVE ONE.

E. L. H.

C. H.

H. C. H.

F. E. H.

THE FAMOUS TRAGEDY

OF THE

QUEEN OF CORNWALL

CHARACTERS

Mark, King of Cornwall.
Sir Tristram.
Sir Andret.
Other Knights.
Squires.
Messenger.
Herald.
Watchman.
Retainers, Musicians, etc.

Iseult the Fair, Queen of Cornwall.
Iseult the Whitehanded.
Dame Brangwain.
Damsel.
The Queen's Attendants, Bowerwomen, etc.

Shades of Dead Old Cornish Men
Shades of Dead Cornish Women } *Chanters.*

Merlin.

The Time covered by the events is about the Time of representation.

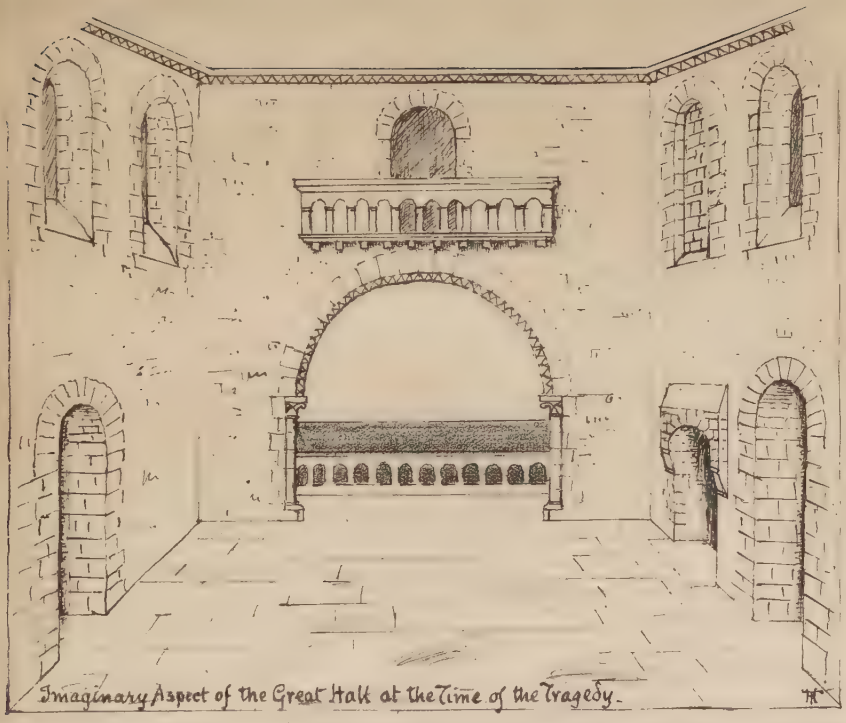
ILLUSTRATIONS

Imaginary view of Tintagel Castle at the Time of the Tragedy . . . . *Frontispiece*
Imaginary aspect of the Great Hall at the Time of the Tragedy . . . . *To face page* 4

The Stage is any large room; round or at the end of which the audience sits. It is assumed to be the interior of the Great Hall of Tintagel Castle: that the floor is strewn with rushes: that there is an arch in the back-centre (a doorway or other opening may counterfeit this) through which the Atlantic is visible across an outer ward and over the ramparts of the stronghold: that a door is on the left, and one on the right (curtains, screens or chairs may denote these): that a settle spread with skins is among the moveables: that above at the back is a gallery (which may be represented by any elevated piece of furniture on which two actors can stand, in a corner of the room screened off).

☞ *Should the performance take place in a real theatre, the aforesaid imaginary surroundings may be supplied by imitative scenery.*

The costumes of the players are the conventional ones of linen fabrics, made gay with knots and rosettes of ribbon, as in the old mumming shows; though on an actual stage they may be more realistic.



Imaginary Aspect of the Great Hall at the Time of the Tragedy.

PROLOGUE

Enter MERLIN, *a phantasmal figure with a white wand. The room is darkened: a blue light may be thrown on Merlin.*

MERLIN

I come, at your persuasive call,
To raise up in this modern hall
A tragedy of dire duresse
That vexed the Land of Lyonnesse:—
Scenes, with their passions, hopes, and fears
Sunk into shade these thousand years;
To set, in ghostly grave array,
  Their blitheness, blood, and tears,
Feats, ardours, as if rife to-day
  Before men's eyes and ears.

The tale has travelled far and wide:—
Yea, that King Mark, to fetch his bride,
Sent Tristram; then that he and she
Quaffed a love-potion witlessly
While homeward bound. Hence that the
  King

Wedded one heart-aflame
For Tristram! He, in dark despair,
Roved recklessly, and wived elsewhere
One of his mistress' name.

I saw these times I represent,
Watched, gauged them as they came and went,
Being ageless, deathless! And those two
Fair women—namesakes—well I knew!
Judge them not harshly in a love
Whose hold on them was strong;
Sorrow therein they tasted of,
And deeply, and too long!

Exit.

SCENE I

SHADES OF DEAD OLD CORNISH MEN, SHADES OF DEAD CORNISH WOMEN } CHANTERS { *Right and left in Front.*

CHANTERS: MEN (*in recitative*)

Tristram a captive of King Mark,
Racked was the Queen with qualm and cark,
Till reached her hand a written line,
That quickened her to deft design.

CHANTERS: WOMEN

Then, Tristram out, and Mark shut in,
The Queen and Tristram winged to win
Gard Castle, where, without annoy,
Monthswhile they lodged in matchless joy!

CHANTERS: MEN

Anon, when Queen Iseult had homed,
Brittany-wards Sir Tristram roamed
To greet his waiting wife,

White-handed Iseult, whom the Queen
Had recked not of. But soon, in teen
  And troublous inner strife,
She Tristram of her soul besought
By wringing letters rapid-wrought
(The King gone hunting, knowing nought)
  To come again to her
Even at the cost—such was her whim—
Of bringing Whitehands back with him
  In wifely character.

CHANTERS: WOMEN

There was no answer. Rest she could not;
Then we missed her, days. We would not
  Think where she might have been.
And, having sailed, maybe, twice ten
Long leagues, here came she back again,
And sad and listless—just as when
  She went—abides her mien!

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

Hist! . . . Lo; there by the nether gate
New comers hail! O who should wait
The postern door to enter by,
  The bridge being clearly seen?
The King returned?—But that way; why?
Would he try trap his Queen?

WATCHMAN (*crossing without the archway*)
The King's arriving! Ho!

Enter HERALD. *Sounds a trumpet.*
Enter BRANGWAIN.

SCENE II

HERALD, BRANGWAIN, AND CHANTERS.

HERALD

The King's at hand!

BRANGWAIN

God's grace, she's home, either from far or near!

HERALD

Whither plied she? Many would like to hear!

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

We do not know. We will not know.
She took a ship from the shore below,
And was gone many days.
By friending winds she's back before him:
Extol God should she and adore Him
For covering up her ways!

Enter KING MARK *with* SIR ANDRET *and other Knights, retinue, and rude music of ram's-horns, crouds, and humstrums,* BRANGWAIN *standing aside.*

SCENE III

KING MARK, KNIGHTS, RETINUE, ETC., BRANGWAIN, AND CHANTERS.

K. MARK

Where is the Queen?

Drinks from silver flagon which has been standing on the hearth on a brandise. Retinue drink after him from the same.

BRANGWAIN (*advancing*)

Sir King, the Queen attires
To meet your Majesty, and now comes down.
(*Aside.*) Haply he will not know!

Enter QUEEN ISEULT THE FAIR *attended, and followed by the hound* HOUDAIN.

SCENE IV

QUEEN ISEULT, KING MARK, KNIGHTS, BRANGWAIN, ETC., AND CHANTERS.

(Q. ISEULT *has dark hair, and wears a crimson robe, and tiara or circlet.*)

MARK *smacks the* QUEEN *on her shoulders in rough greeting.*

K. MARK

Why is this brachet in the hall again?

Q. ISEULT

I know not how she came here.

K. MARK

Nay, my wife,
Thou dost know well—as I know women well!—
And know her owner more than well, I reckon,
And that he left the beast to your regard.

He kicks the dog away.

SIR ANDRET (*aside to* K. MARK)

Aye, aye, great King, thou speakest wisely on't
This time as ever. Wives dost thrid all through!

Exeunt severally KNIGHTS, RETINUE, ETC., *and* BRANGWAIN.

SCENE V

King Mark, Queen Iseult, and Chanters.

Q. Iseult

I've not beheld of late the man you mean;
Maybe, my lord, you have shut him in the dungeon,
As you did formerly!

K. Mark

You spell me better!
And know he has felt full liberty for long,
And that you would have seen him, and much more,
Had not debarred you one o' those crosses which,
Happily, scotch unlawful lovers' schemes
No less than sanct intents. If that good knight
Dallies in Brittany with his good wife—
So finger-white—to cheer her as he ought,
'Tis clear he can't be here.

Q. Iseult (*with slight sarcasm*)

'Tis clear. You plead
Somewhat in waste to prove as much. But, faith, (*petulantly*)
'Twas she, times tiresome, quirked and called to him
Or he would not have gone!

K. Mark

Ah, know'st thou that!
Leave her alone, a woman let's all out!
Well, I may know things too. I slipped in sly
When I came home by now, and lit on this:
That while I've sued the chase you followed him,
Vanishing on a voyage of some days,
Which you'd fain cloak from me, and have confessed
To no one, either, of my people here.

Q. Iseult (*evasively*)

I went to take the air, being qualmed to death.
Surely a queen is dowered with such degree
Of queenship, or what is't to be a queen?

No foot, I swear, set I in Brittany,
Or upon soil of any neighbour shore,
'Twixt putting from the cove below these walls
And my return hereto.

K. Mark

Protests—no more!
You sailed off somewhere,—(so a sea-nath * hints me
That heeds the tidings every troubled billow
Wails to the Beeny-Sisters from Pen-Tyre)—
At risk, too, of your life, the ship being small,
And trickful tempests lurking in the skies.
A woman does not raise a mast for nought
On a cockle-shell, even be the sea-signs fair.
But I have scorned to ask the mariners
The course you bore—or north, or south, or what—
It might have been to Brittany, it might not!

Q. Iseult

I have not seen him.

* *nath*, a puffin (Cornish).

K. Mark

Well, you might have done't
Each sunrise, noon, or eve, for all the joy
You show in my return, or gladness wont
To a queen shore-reached in safety—so they tell me—
Since you crept cat-like home.

Q. Iseult (*indignantly*)

I saw him not!
You stifle speech in me, or I'd have launched,
Ere this, the tidings rife. See him no more
Shall I, or you. He's gone. Death darkens him!

K. Mark (*starting*)

So much the better, if true—for us and him!
(*She weeps.*)
But no. He has died too many many times
For that report to hold! In tilts, in frays,
Through slits and loops, louvres and battlements,
Has he been pierced and arrowed to the heart,
Then risen up again to trouble me!
Sir Andret told, ere Tristram shunned Tintagel,

How he espied you dallying—you and he—
Near the shot-window southward. And I went
With glaive in hand to smite him. Would I had!
Yea, and I should have, had I been sustained.
But not one knight was nigh.—Where are they now?
Whence comes this quietude?—I'll call a council:
What's best to do with him I'll learn thereat,
And then we'll keep a feast. A council! Ho!

Exit KING MARK.

SCENE VI

QUEEN ISEULT AND CHANTERS.
The Queen sits in dejection.

CHANTERS: MEN

Why did Heaven warrant, in its whim,
A twain mismated should bedim
The courts of their encompassment
With bleeding loves and discontent!
Who would not feel God favoured them,
Past wish, in throne and diadem?
And that for all His plaisance they would praise
Him upon earth throughout their deeds and days!

CHANTERS: WOMEN

Instead, see King and Queen more curst
Than beggars upon holt or hurst:—
A queen! One who each night and morn
Sighs for Sir Tristram; him, gloom-born
In his mother's death, and reared mid vows
Of poison by a later spouse:

In love Fate-haunted, doomed to drink
Charmed philtres, melting every link
Of purposed faith! Why wedded he
King Howel's lass of Brittany?
Why should the wave have washed him to her shore—
Him, prone to love our Queen here more and more?

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

In last misfortune did he well-nigh slay
Unknowingly in battle Arthur! Ay,
Our stainless Over-king of Counties—he
Made Dux Bellorum for his valiancy!—
If now, indeed, Tristram be chilled in death,
Will she, the Queen, care aught for further breath?

Q. ISEULT (*musing*)

How little he knows, does Mark! And yet, how much?
Can there be any groundage for his thought
That Tristram's not a ghost? O, no such hope!
My Tristram, yet not mine! Could it be deemed
Thou shouldst have loved me less in many years
Hadst thou enjoyed them? If in Christland now

Do you look down on *her* most, or on *me*?
Why should the King have grudged so fleet a life
Its pleasure, grinned with gall at its renown,
Yapped you away for too great love of me,
Spied on thee through his myrmidons—aye, encloaked
And peeped to frustrate thee, and sent the word
To kill thee who should meet thee? O sweet Lord,
Thou hast made him hated; yet he still has life;
While Tristram. . . . Why said Mark he doubtless lived?
—But he was ever a mocker, was King Mark,
And not far from a coward.

Enter BRANGWAIN

SCENE VII

Queen Iseult, Brangwain, and Chanters.

Q. Iseult (*distractedly*)

Brangwain, he hard denies I did not see him!
But he is dead! . . . Perhaps not. . . .
Can it be?

Brangwain

Who doth deny, my Queen? Who is not dead?
Your words are blank to me; your manner strange.

Q. Iseult

One bleeds no more on earth for a full-fledged sin
Than for a callow! The King has found out now
My sailing the south water in his absence,
And weens the worst. Forsooth, it's always so!

He will not credit I'd no cause to land
For the black reason—it is no excuse—
That Tristram, knight, had died!—Landed had I,
Aye, fifty times, could he have still been there,
Even there with her.—My Love, my own lost Love! (*She bends down.*)

BRANGWAIN

You did not land in Brittany, O Queen?

Q. ISEULT

I did not land, Brangwain, although so near.
(*She pauses.*)
—He had been long with his White-handed one,
And had fallen sick of fever nigh to death;
Till she grew fearful for him; sent for me,
Yea, choicelessly, at his light-headed calls
And midnight repetitions of my name.
Yes, sent for me in a despairing hope
To save him at all cost.

BRANGWAIN

She must, methinks,
Have loved him much!

Q. Iseult (*impatiently*)

Don't speak, Brangwain, but hear me.
Yes: women are so. . . . For me, I could not bear
To lose him thus. Love, others' somewhile dainty,
Is my starved, all-day meal! And favouring chance,
That of the King's apt absence, tempted me;
And hence I sailed, despite the storm-strid air.
What did I care about myself, or aught?
—She'd told the mariner her messenger
To hoist his canvas white if he bore me
On the backward journey, black if he did not,
That, so, heart-ease should reach the knight full quick—
Even ere I landed—quick as I hove in sight.
Yes, in his peril so profound, she sent
The message, though against her. Women are so!

Brangwain

Some are, my lady Queen: some may not be.

Q. Iseult

While we were yet a two-hours' toss from port

I bade them show the sheet, as had been asked,
The which they did. But when we touched the quay
She ran down thither, beating both her hands,
And saying Tristram died an hour before.

BRANGWAIN

But O, dear Queen, didst fully credit her?

Q. ISEULT

Aye! Sudden-shaken souls guess not at guile.—
I fell into a faint at the very words.—
Thereon they lifted me into the cabin,
Saying: "She shall not foot this deadly land!"
When I again knew life I was distraught,
And sick with the rough writhing of the bark.—
They had determined they would steer me home,
Had turned the prow, and toiled a long league back;
Strange that, no sooner had they put about,
The weather worsed, as if they'd angered God

By doing what they had done to sever me
Even from my Love's dead limbs! No gleam glowed more,
And the seas sloped like houseroofs all the way.
We were blown north along the shore to Wales,
Where they made port and nursed me, till, next day,
The blinding gale abated: we returned,
And reached by shifts at last the cove below.
The King, whose queries I had feared so much,
Had not come back; came only at my heels;
Yet he has learnt, somewise, that I've been missed,
And doubtless I shall suffer—he's begun it!
Much I lament I put about so soon.
I should have landed, and have gained his corpse.

BRANGWAIN

She is his wife, and you could not have claimed it.

Q. ISEULT

But could I not have seen him? How know you?

BRANGWAIN

Nay: she might not have let you even see
him:
He is her own, dear Queen, and in her land
You had no sway to make her cede him up.
I doubt his death. You took her word for it,
And she was desperate at the sight of you.
Sick unto death he may have been. But—
dead? (*Shakes her head.*)
Corpses are many: man lives half-amort;
But rumour makes them more when they run
short!

Q. ISEULT

If he be not! O I would even condone
His bringing her, would he not come without;
I've said it ever since I've known of her.
Could he but live: yes, could he live for me!

Q. ISEULT *sings sadly to herself*, BRANGWAIN *having gone to the back of the hall*:

Could he but live for me
A day, yea, even an hour,
Its petty span would be
Steeped in felicity
Passing the price of Heaven's held-dearest
dower:
Could he but live, could *he*
But live for me!

Exit Q. ISEULT, *followed by* BRANGWAIN.

CHANTERS: WOMEN

Maybe, indeed, he did not die!
Our sex, shame on't, is over prone
To ill conceits that amplify.
Maybe he did not die—that one,
The Whitepalmed, may in strategy
Have but avowed it! Weak are we,
And foil and fence have oft to seek,
Aye, even by guile, if fear so speak!

CHANTERS: MEN

Wounded in Ireland, life he fetched,
In charge of the King's daughter there,
Who healed him, loved him, primed him fair
For the great tournament, when he stretched
Sir Palomides low.

CHANTERS: WOMEN

Yet slight
Was King Mark's love for him, despite!
Mark sent him thither as to gain
Iseult, but, truly, to be slain!

CHANTERS: MEN

Quite else her father, who on sight
Was fain for Tristram as his son,

Not Mark. But woe, his word was won!
Alas, should wrong vow stand as right?

CHANTERS: WOMEN

And what Dame Brangwain did to mend,
Enlarged the mischief! Best have penned
That love-drink close, since 'twas to be
Iseult should wed where promised: wretched
she!

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

Yet, haply, Tristram lives. Quick heals are
his!
He rose revived from that: why not from
this?

WATCHMAN (*without*)

One comes with tidings!—(*to the comer*)
Bear them to the hall.

Enter a Messenger (*at back*), *pausing and looking round.* QUEEN ISEULT, *attended, re-enters* (*at front*) *and seats herself.*

SCENE VIII

Queen Iseult, Attendant-Ladies, Messenger, and Chanters.

Messenger (*coming forward*)

Where is Iseult the Queen?

Q. Iseult

Here, churl. I'm she.

Messenger

I'm sent here to deliver tidings, Queen,
To your high ear alone.

Exeunt Attendants.

Q. Iseult (*in strung-up tones*)

Then voice them forth.
A halter for thee if I find them false!

MESSENGER

Knight Tristram of the sorry birth is yet
Enrolled among the living, having crept
Out of the very vaults of death and doom!
—His heavy ails bedimmed him numb as night,
And men conceived him wrapt in wakeless rest;
But he strove back. Hither, on swifter keel
He has followed you; and even now is nigh.

(QUEEN ISEULT *leans back and covers her eyes.*)

Iseult the Pale-palmed, in her jealousy,
With false deliverance feigned your sail was black,
And made him pray for death in his extreme,
Till sank he to a drowse: grey death they thought it,
And bells were bidden toll the churches through,
And thereupon you came. Scared at her crime
She deemed that it had dealt him death indeed,
And knew her not at fault till you had gone.
—When he aroused, and learnt she had sent you back,

It angered him to hot extremity,
And brings him here upon my very stern,
If he, forsooth, have haleness for the adventure.

Exit Messenger.

Q. Iseult

O it o'erturns! . . . "Black" told she!
Cheat unmatchable!

Enter Brangwain.

SCENE IX

Queen Iseult, Brangwain, and Chanters. Then King Mark and Sir Andret.

Brangwain

There stands a strange old harper down below,
Who does not look Sir Tristram, yet recalls him.

King Mark *crosses the ward outside the arch.*

King Mark
(*speaking off, and shading his eyes*)

What traveller's that, slow mounting to the wall,
Scanning its strength, with curious halting crawl,
As knowing not Tintagel's Towers at all?

Watchman (*crossing without*)

'Tis but a minstrel from afar, Sir King,
Harping around for alms, or anything.

Q. Iseult (*starting up*)

It must be he!

Sir Tristram's *steps heard approaching. He enters, disguised as a harper.*

King Mark (*glancing back casually at* Sir Tristram *in going off*)

Dole him his alms in Christ's name, if ye must,
And irk me not while setting to bowse with these.

Exit King Mark *from the outside to the banqueting-hall, followed across the back of the arch by Knights, etc., including* Sir Andret.

Sir Andret (*to himself as he goes*)

That harper struck me oddly! . . . In his gait—
Well: till the beakers have gone round I'll wait.

Exit behind the others.

SCENE X

Queen Iseult, Tristram, Brangwain, and Chanters.

Tristram

My Queen and best belov'd! At last again!
(*He throws off the cloak that disguises him.*)
—Know I was duped by her who dons your name;
She swore the bellied sheeting of your ship
Blotted the wind-wafts like a sable swan;
And being so weak from my long lying there
I sank to senselessness at the wisht words—
So contrary to hope! Whilst I was thus
She sallied out, and sent you home forthwith!
Anon I poured my anger on her head,
Till, in high fear of me, she quivered white.
—I mended swiftly, stung by circumstance,

And rose and left her there, and followed you.
Sir Kay lent aidance, and has come with me.

BRANGWAIN

I'll out and watch the while Sir Tristram's here.

Exit BRANGWAIN.

SCENE XI

Queen Iseult, Tristram, and Chanters.

Q. Iseult

You've come again, you've come again, dear Love!

Tristram

To be once more with my Iseult the Fair,
(*He embraces the Queen.*)
Though not yet what I was in strength and stay.
Yet told have I been by Sir Launcelot
To ware me of King Mark! King Fox he calls him—
Whom I'd have pitied, though he would not yield thee,
Nor let you loose on learning our dire need
Of freedom for our bliss, which came to us
Not of fore-aim or falseness, but by spell
Of love-drink, ministered by hand unseen!

Q. Iseult

Knowing as much, he swore he would not slay thee,
But Launcelot told him no man could believe him,
Whereat he answered: "Anyhow she's mine!"

Tristram

It's true, I fear. He cannot be believed.

Q. Iseult

Yet, Tristram, would my husband were but all!
Had you not wedded her my namesake, Oh,
We could have steered around this other rock—
Trust me we could! Why did you do it, why!
Triumph did he when first I learnt of that,
And lewdly laughed to see me shaken so.

Tristram

You have heard the tale of my so mating her
Twice told, and yet anew! Must I again?
It was her sire King Howel brought it round
In brunt of battle, when I saved his lands.

He said to me: "Thou hast done generously:
I crave to make thee recompense! My daughter,
The last best bloom of Western Monarchy—
Iseult of the White Hand the people call her—
Is thine. I give thee her. O take her then,
The chief of all things priceless unto me!"
Overcome was I by the fiery fray,
Arrested by her name—so kin to yours—
His ardour, zeal. I thought: "Maybe her spouse,
By now, has haled my Iseult's heart from me,"
And took the other blindly. That is all.

Q. Iseult

A woman's heart has room for one alone;
A man's for two or three!

Tristram

Sweet; 'twas but chance!

Q. Iseult (*more softly*)

Yet there may lie our doom! . . . I had nerved myself
To bid you come, and bring your wife with you.

But that I did not mean. It was too
much;
And yet I said it! . . .

TRISTRAM

Lean ye down, my Love:
I'll touch to thee my very own old tune.
I came in harper-guise, unweeting what
The hazardry of our divided days
Might have brought forth for us!

He takes the harp. QUEEN ISEULT *reclines.*

TRISTRAM (*singing*)

Let's meet again to-night, my Fair,
Let's meet unseen of all;
The day-god labours to his lair,
And then the evenfall!

O living lute, O lily-rose,
O form of fantasie,
When torches waste and warders doze
Steal to the stars will we!

While nodding knights carouse at meat
And shepherds shamble home,
We'll cleave in close embracements—sweet
As honey in the comb!

Till crawls the dawn from Condol's crown,
And over Neitan's Kieve,
As grimly ghosts we conjure down
And hopes still weave and weave!

WATCHMAN (*crossing without*)

A ship sheers round, and brings up in the bay!

Re-enter BRANGWAIN.

SCENE XII

Queen Iseult, Tristram, Brangwain, and Chanters.

Brangwain

My Queen, the shingle shaves another keel,
And who the comer is we fail to guess.
Its build bespeaks it from the Breton coasts,
And those upon it shape of the Breton sort,
And the figure near the prow is white-attired.

Q. Iseult

What manner of farer does the figure show?

Brangwain

My Lady, when I cast eye waterwards
From the arrow-loop, just as the keel ground in

Against the popplestones, it seemed a woman's;
But she was wimpled close.

Q. Iseult

I'll out and see.

Queen Iseult *opens the door to the banqueting-hall, and stands in the doorway still visible to the audience. Through the door comes the noise of trenchers, platters, cups, drunken voices, songs, etc., from the adjoining apartment, where* King Mark *is dining with Knights and retainers.*

Voice of K. Mark (*in liquor*)

Queen, whither goest thou? Pray plague me not
While keeping table. Hath the old knave left,
He with his balladry we heard by now
Strum up to thee?

Q. Iseult

I go to the pleasance only,
Across your feasting-hall for shortness' sake,
Returning hither swift.

VOICE OF K. MARK

Yea, have thy way,
As women will!

VOICE OF SIR ANDRET

Aye, hence the need to spy them!

Exeunt QUEEN ISEULT *and* BRANGWAIN *through banqueting-hall to the outside of the Castle. Noise of cups, trenchers, drunken voices, songs, etc., resumed, till the door shuts, when it is heard in subdued tones.*

SCENE XIII

TRISTRAM AND CHANTERS. THEN ISEULT THE WHITEHANDED.

TRISTRAM
(*going and looking seaward through arch*)

A woman's shape in white. . . . Can it be
she?
Would she in sooth, then, risk to follow me?

CHANTERS: MEN

O Tristram, thou art not to find
Such solace for a shaken mind
As seemed to wait thee here!

CHANTERS: WOMEN

One seised of right to trace thy track
Hath crossed the sea to win thee back
In love and faith and fear!

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

From this newcomer wis we pain
Ere thou canst know sweet spells again,
O knight of little cheer!

Enter ISEULT THE WHITEHANDED. *She has corn-brown hair, and wears a white robe.*

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

I could not help it, O my husband! Yea
I have dogged you close; I could not bear
your rage;
And Heaven has favoured me! The sea
smiled smooth
The whole way over, and the sun shone kind.
Your sail was eyesome fair in front of me,
And I steered just behind, all stealthfully!
—Forgive me that I spoke untruly to you,
And then to her, in my bruised brain's
turmoil.
But, in a way of saying, you were dead;
You seemed so—in a dead drowse when she
came.
And I did send for her at your entreaty;
But flesh is frail. Centred is woman's love,
And knows no breadth. I could not let her
land,
I could not let her come!

TRISTRAM

Your speech is nought,
O evil woman, who didst nearly witch
The death of this Queen, saying such of me!

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

Forgive me, do forgive, my lord, my husband!
I love, have loved you so imperishably;
Not with fleet flame at times, as some do use!
Had I once been unfaithful, even perverse,
I would have held some coldness fitly won;
But I have ever met your wryest whim
With ready-wrought acceptance, matched your moods,
Clasped hands, touched lips, and smiled devotedly;
So how should this have grown up unaware?

Enter QUEEN ISEULT *and* BRANGWAIN *in the Gallery above, unperceived.*

SCENE XIV

Queen Iseult, Brangwain, Iseult the Whitehanded, Tristram, and Chanters.

Q. Iseult

What do they say? And who is she, Brangwain?
Not my suspicion hardened into mould
Of flesh and blood indeed?

Brangwain

I cannot hear.

Tristram

I have no more to say or do with thee;
I'd fade your face to strangeness in my eyes!
Your father dealt me illest turn in this;
Your name, too, being the match of hers!
Yea, thus
I was coerced. I never more can be
Your bed-mate—never again.

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

How, Tristram mine?
What meaning mete you out by that to me?
You only say it, do you? You are not,
Cannot be, in true earnest—that I know!
I hope you are not in earnest?—Surely I
This time as always, do belong to you,
And you are going to keep me always yours?
I thought you loved my name for me myself,
Not for another; or at the very least
For sake of some dear sister or mother dead,
And not, not—

(*She breaks down.*)

TRISTRAM

I spoke too rawly, maybe; mouthed what I
Ought only to have mused. But do you dream
I for a leastness longer could abide
Such dire disastrous lying?—Back to your ship;
Get into it; return by the aptest wind
And mate with another man when thou canst find him,

Never uncovering how you cozened me:
His temper might be tried thereby, as mine!

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

No, no! I won't be any other's wife!
How can a thing so monstrous ever be?

TRISTRAM

If I had battened in Brittany with thee—

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

But you don't *mean* you'll live away from me,
Leave me, and henceforth be unknown to me,
O you don't surely? I could not help coming;
Don't send me away—do not, do not, do so!

(Q. ISEULT *above moves restlessly.*)

Forgive your Iseult for appearing here,
Untoward seem it! For I love you so
Your sudden setting out was death to me
When I discerned the cause. Your sail smalled down:
I should have died had I not followed you.
Only, my Tristram, let me be with thee,
And see thy face. I do not sue for more!

Q. ISEULT (*above*)

She has no claim to importune like that,
And gloss her hardihood in tracking him!

TRISTRAM

Thou canst not haunt another woman's house!

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

O yes I can, if there's no other way!
I have heard she does not mind. I'd rather be
Her bondwench, if I am not good enough
To be your wife, than not stay here at all,—
Aye, I, the child of kings and governors,
As luminous in ancestral line as she,
Say this, so utter my abasement now!
—Something will happen if I go away
Of import dark to you (no matter what
To me); and we two should not greet again!
—Could you but be the woman, I the man,
I would not fly from you or banish you
For fault so small as mine. O do not think
It was so vile a thing. I wish — how much!—
You could have told me twenty such untruths,

That I might then have shown you *I* would not
Rate them as faults, but be much joyed to have you
In spite of all. If you but through and through
Could spell me, know how staunch I have stood, and am,
You'd love me just the same. Come, say you do,
And let us not be severed so again.

Q. Iseult (*above*)

I can't bear this!

Iseult the White H.

All the long hours and days
And heavy gnawing nights, and you not there,
But gone because you hate me! 'Tis past what
A woman can endure!

Tristram (*more gently*)

Not hate you, Iseult.
But, hate or love, lodge here you cannot now:
It's out of thinking.

(*Drunken revellers heard.*)

Know you, that in that room
Just joining this, King Mark is holding feast,
And may burst in with all his wassailers,
And that the Queen—

Q. Iseult (*above*)

He's softening to her. Come!
Let us go down, and face this agony!

Queen Iseult *and* Brangwain *descend from the Gallery.*

Iseult the White H.

O, I suppose I must not! And I am tired,
Tired, tired! And now my once-dear Brittany home
Is but a desert to me.
(Q. Iseult *and* Brangwain *come forward.*)
—Oh, the Queen!
Can I—so weak—encounter—

Q. Iseult

Ah—as I thought,
Quite as I thought. It is my namesake, sure!
(Iseult the White H. *faints. Indecision.* Brangwain *goes to her.*)
Take her away. The blow that bruises her

Is her own dealing. Better she had known
The self-sown pangs of prying ere she sailed!

BRANGWAIN *carries her out*, TRISTRAM *suddenly assisting at the last moment as far as the door.*

CHANTERS: MEN (*as she is carried*)

Fluttering with fear,
Out-tasked her strength has she!
Loss of her Dear
Threatening too clear,
Gone to this length has she!
Strain too severe!

SCENE XV

Queen Iseult, Tristram, and Chanters.

Q. Iseult (*after restlessly watching* Tristram *render aid and return*)

So, after all, am I to share you, then,
With another, Tristram? who, as I count, comes here
To take the Castle as it were her own!

Tristram

Sweet Queen, you said you'd let her come one day!
However, back she's going to Brittany,
Which she should not have left. Think kindly of her,
A weaker one than you!

Q. Iseult

What, Tristram; what!
O this from you to me, who have sacrificed

Honour and name for you so long, so long!
Why, she and I are oil and water here:
Other than disunite we cannot be.
She weaker? Nay, I stand in jeopardy
This very hour—
(*Noise of* MARK *and revellers.*)
Listen to him within!
His peer will pierce your cloak ere long—or would
Were he but sober—and then where am I?
Better for us that I do yield you to her,
And you depart! Hardly can I do else:
In the eyes of men she has all claim to thee
And I have none, yes, she possesses you!—
(*Turning and speaking in a murmur.*)
—Th'other Iseult possesses him, indeed;
And it was I who set it in his soul
To seek her out!—my namesake, whom I felt
A kindness for—alas, I know not why!
(*Sobs silently.*)

CHANTERS: WOMEN

White-Hands did this,
Desperate to win again
Back to her kiss
One she would miss!—
Yea, from the Queen again
Win, for her bliss!

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

Dreams of the Queen
Always possessing him
Racked her yestreen
Cruelly and keen—
Him, once professing him
Hers through Life's scene!

Re-enter BRANGWAIN.

SCENE XVI

TRISTRAM, QUEEN ISEULT, BRANGWAIN, AND CHANTERS.

BRANGWAIN *stands silent a few moments, till* Q. ISEULT *turns and looks demandingly at her.*

BRANGWAIN

The lady from the other coast now mends.

Q. ISEULT (*haughtily*)

Give her good rest. (*Bitterly*) Yes, yes, in sooth I said
That she might come. Put her in mine own bed:
I'll sleep upon the floor!

Exit BRANGWAIN.

TRISTRAM

'Tis in your bitterness,
My own sweet Queen, that you speak thus
and thus!

Enter KING MARK *with* SIR ANDRET *to the Gallery, unperceived.*

SCENE XVII

KING MARK AND SIR ANDRET (*above*): QUEEN ISEULT, TRISTRAM, AND CHANTERS.

SIR ANDRET (*to* K. MARK)

See, here they are. God's 'ounds, sure, then was he
That harper I misdoubted once or twice;
Or must have come while we were clinking cups,
No mischief dreaming!

TRISTRAM

But, my best-beloved,
Forgo these frets, and think of Joyous Gard!
(*Approaches her.*)

Q. ISEULT (*drawing back*)

Nay, no more claspings! And if it should be
That these new meetings operate on me

(You well know what I am touching on in this)
Mayhap by year's-end I'll not be alive,
The which I almost pray for—

K. Mark (*above*)

Then 'tis so!
Their dalliances are in full gush again,
Though I had deemed them hindered by his stay,
And vastly talked of ties, in Brittany.

Sir Andret

Such is betokened, certes, by their words,
If we but wit them straight.

Tristram

O Queen my Love,
Pray sun away this cloud, and shine again;
Throw into your ripe voice and burning soul
The music that they held in our aforetime:
We shall outweather this!
(*Enter* Damsel *with a letter.*)
Who jars us now?

SCENE XIX

Queen Iseult, Tristram, King Mark, Sir Andret, and Chanters.

Tristram

Sure, Mark was drunk
When writing such! Late he fed heavily
And has, I judge, roved out with his boon knightage
Till evenfall shall bring him in to roost.

Q. Iseult

I wonder! . . . (*nestling closer*) I've forebodings, Tristram dear;
But, your death's mine, Love!

Tristram

And yours mine, Sweet Heart! . . .
—Now that the hall is lulled, and none seems near,

I'll keep up my old minstrel character
And sing to you, ere I by stealth depart
To wait an hour more opportune for love.—
I could, an if I would, sing jeeringly
Of the King; I mean the song Sir Dinadan
Made up about him. He was mighty wroth
To hear it.

Q. Iseult

Nay, Love; sadness suits you best . . .
Sad, sad are we: we will not jeer at him:
Such darkness overdraws us, it may whelm
Us even with him my master! Sing of love.
(Tristram *harps a prelude.*)
I hope he may not heel back home and hear!

Tristram (*singing and playing*)

Yea, Love, true is it sadness suits me best!
Sad, sad we are; sad, sad shall ever be.
What shall deliver us from Love's unrest,
And bonds we did not forecast, did not see!

Q. Iseult

Yea, who will dole us, in these chains that chafe,
Bare pity! — O were ye my King — not he!

(*She weeps, and he embraces her awhile.*)

Tristram (*thoughtfully*)

Where is King Mark? I must be soon away!

King Mark, *having drawn his dagger, creeps up behind* Tristram.

K. Mark (*in a thick voice*)

He's in his own house, where he ought to be,
Aye, here! where thou'lt be not much longer, man!

He runs Tristram *through the back with his dagger.* Queen Iseult *shrieks.* Tristram *falls,* Queen Iseult *sinking down by him with clasped hands.* Sir Andret *descends quickly from the gallery.*

TRISTRAM (*weakly*)

From you!—against whom never have I sinned
But under sorcery unwittingly,
By draining deep the love-compelling vial
In my sick thirst, as innocently did she! . . .
This, when of late you sent for me, before
I went to Brittany, to come and help you!
" Fair nephew," said you, " here upswarm our foes;
They are stark at hand, and must be strongly met
Sans tarriance, or they'll uproot my realm."
" My power," said I, " is all at your command."
I came. I neared in night-time to the gate,
Where the hot host of Sessoines clung encamped;
Killed them at th'entrance, and got in to you,
Who welcomed me with joy. I forth'd again,
Again slew more, and saved the stronghold's fame!
Yet you (*weaker*) requite me thus! You might—have fought me!

(K. MARK *droops his head in silence.*)

SIR ANDRET

O fie upon thee, traitor, pleading thus!
It profits naught. To-day here sees thee die!

TRISTRAM

O Andret, Andret; this from thee to me—
Thee, whom I onetime held my fastest friend;
Wert thou as I, I would not treat thee so!
(SIR ANDRET *turns aside and looks down.*)
(*Weaker.*) Fair Knights, bethink ye what I've done for Cornwall,—
Its fate was on my shoulder—and I saved it!—
Yea, thick in jeopardies I've thrust myself
To fame your knighthood!—daily stretched my arm
For—the weal—of you—all!

TRISTRAM *dies.*

Q. ISEULT
(*springing up, the King standing dazed*)

O murderer, husband called!—possest of me
Against my nature and my pleading tears,
When all my heart was Tristram's—his past wording,

To your own knowledge. Now this mute
red mouth
You've gored in my Belovéd, bids me act:
Act do I then. So out you—follow him!

She snatches KING MARK'S *dagger from his belt and stabs him with it.* KING MARK *falls and dies.* QUEEN ISEULT *rushes out.* SIR ANDRET, *stooping and finding the King dead, follows after the Queen. A few moments' pause during which the sea and sky darken, and the wind rises, distant thunder murmuring. Enter Watchman; next* BRANGWAIN.

SCENE XX

WATCHMAN AND CHANTERS, WITH THE DEAD KING AND TRISTRAM; THEN BRANGWAIN.

WATCHMAN

She's glode off like a ghost, with deathy mien;
It seems toward the ledge—yes, she—the Queen.

BRANGWAIN (*entering hurriedly*)

She's over the cliff, and Tristram's brachet with her! . . .
What have we here? . . . Sir Tristram's body? O!

CHANTERS: MEN. (BRANGWAIN *standing and gradually drooping during their chant*)

Alas, for this wroth day!
She's leapt the ledge and fallen
Into the loud black bay,
Whose waters, loosed and swollen,
Are spirting into spray!

She's vanished from the world,
Over the blind rock hurled;
And the little hound her friend
Has made with hers its end!

CHANTERS: WOMEN

Alas, for this wroth day!
Our Tristram, noble knight,
A match for Arthur's might,
Lies here as quaking clay.
This is no falsehood fell,
But very truth indeed
That we too surely read!
Would that we had to tell
But pleasant truth alway!

BRANGWAIN (*arousing and gazing round*)

Here's more of this same stuff of death. Look down—
What see I lying there? King Mark, too, slain?
The sea's dark noise last night, the sky's vast yawn
Of hollow bloodshot cloud, meant murder, then,
As I divined!

Enter ISEULT THE WHITEHANDED, *Queen's Ladies, Retainers, Bower-women, and others.*

SCENE XXI

ISEULT THE WHITEHANDED, BRANGWAIN, QUEEN'S LADIES, ETC., AND CHANTERS.

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

I heard her cry. I saw her leap! How fair
She was! What wonder that my brother Kay
Should pine for love of her. . . . O she should not
Have done it to herself! Nor life nor death
Is worth a special quest.
(*She sees* TRISTRAM'S *body.*)
What's this—my husband?
My Tristram dead likewise? *He* one with *her*?
(*She sinks and clasps* TRISTRAM.)

CHANTERS: M. AND W.

Slain by King Mark unseen, in evil vow,
Who never loved him! Pierced in the back —aye, now,
By sleight no codes of chivalry allow!

ISEULT THE WHITE H.

And she beholding! *That* the cause wherefor
She went and took her life? He was not hers. . . .
Yet did she love him true, if wickedly!

Re-enter SIR ANDRET, *with other Knights, Squires, Herald, etc.*

SCENE XXII

ISEULT THE WHITEHANDED, BRANGWAIN, SIR ANDRET, ETC., AND CHANTERS.

SIR ANDRET (*saturninely*)

Nor sight nor sound of her! A Queen. 'Od's blood,
Her flaws in life get mended by her death,
And she and Tristram sport re-burnished fames!

ISEULT THE WHITE H.
(*seeing* MARK's *body*)

And the King also dead? My Tristram's slayer?
Yet strange to me. Then even had I not come
Across the southern water recklessly

This would have shaped the same—the very same.

(*Turning again to* TRISTRAM.)

Tristram, dear husband! O! . . .

(*She rocks herself over him.*)

What a rare beauteous knight has perished here
By this most cruel craft! Could not King Mark
If wronged, have chid him—minded him of me,
And not done this, done this! Well, well; she's lost him,
Even as have I.—This stronghold moans with woes,
And jibbering voices join with winds and waves
To make a dolorous din! . . .

(*They lift her.*)

Aye, I will rise—
Betake me to my own dear Brittany—
Dearer in that our days there were so sweet,
Before I knew what pended me elsewhere!
These halls are hateful to me! May my eyes
Meet them no more!

(*She turns to go.*)

BRANGWAIN

I will attend you, Madam.

Exit ISEULT THE WHITEHANDED *assisted by* BRANGWAIN *and Bowerwomen. Knights, retainers, etc., lift the bodies and carry them out. A Dirge by the Chanters.*

EPILOGUE

Re-enter MERLIN

Thus from the past, the throes and themes
Whereof I spake—now dead as dreams—
  Have been re-shaped and drawn
In feinted deed and word, as though
Our shadowy and phantasmal show
Were very movements to and fro
  Of forms so far-off gone.

These warriors and dear women, whom
I've called, as bidden, from the tomb,
  May not have failed to raise
An antique spell at moments here?
—They were, in their long-faded sphere,
As you are now who muse thereat;
Their mirth, crimes, fear and love begat
  Your own, though thwart their ways;
And may some pleasant thoughts outshape
From this my conjuring to undrape
  Such ghosts of distant days!

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